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ABSTRACT

Education helps children select and progress toward appropriate goals. One of the impediments to education for American students is their lack of skill in English. Clear insight into the essentials of language comes from observing how the variables function in a model language such as Esperanto. Once children understand the basic anatomy of language, they will not be defeated by the rules of the English language, where fully 80% of the words are not spelled phonetically. Esperanto serves as a generic introduction for all languages and should be taught in first or second grade. Since it is unlike foreign languages it can easily be learned by classroom teachers. Esperanto can serve as an ideal transition into formal English for English-speaking children, and can serve children of different native languages by helping them with the transition into English. Esperanto in the elementary school can convert the abject failure of foreign language programs into success. (CR)

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THE NEED TO IMPROVE LANGUAGE ARTS EDUCATION BY MEANS OF ESPERANTO

It is generally recognized that better education is the most productive way to social progress. Education helps children select appropriate goals and make progress toward them. This automatically can reduce poverty, disease and crime.

One of the impediments to education in the United States is the lack of skill in English. All subsequent education depends on the effectiveness of studies lumped together as language arts. Unfortunately language arts education fails our students.

An American school child must make the transition from merely babbling English at the beginning of schooling to having an easy familiarity with formally correct English, in both spoken and written forms, upon graduation. Without this skill it is virtually impossible to succeed professionally or financially in the United States today.

Most parents intensely want this skill for their children. They make great sacrifices for education. And they are frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the current language arts curriculum. Three general indicators of that ineffectiveness are

1. Functional illiteracy : 19% of the adult population
2. College entrants needing remedial English: 40% (56% in Chicago)
3. Science education restricted by poor comprehension of English. (More than half of the U.S. adults don't know the answer as to whether the earth goes around the sun once a year or not.)

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CAUSES OF POOR ACCOMPLISHMENT IN ENGLISH.

Why is the language arts curriculum so unproductive? Because we are
1. asking our children to climb a high mountain
2. without adequate preparation and equipment.

Mastery of English is indeed a high mountain. Almost every aspect of English, from spelling to subjunctives, is chaotic. CRAZY ENGLISH is 188 pages of laughter by Richard Lederer over phrases like "I can't stand sitting down". But confusion is not funny to a child trying to learn formally correct English.

The childish mind is logical when it wants to say "he doed it" instead of "he did it", and it is English which is ridiculous - not the child. The child needs to have a logically based set of tenses as a reference. The simple concept of pluralization should give rise to a correspondingly simple modification of the singular, not the tangle of multiple forms contained in English. Making a yes/no question from a declarative sentence shouldn't confuse the issue by forcing the rearrangement of its words as in English. Verbs which change for person and number, as in English, divert the attention of children who are trying to understand predicates.

Fully 80% of English words are not spelled phonetically. Words with silent letters number more than 60%. There are more than 250 ways to spell the 44 sounds of English. The 500 most common words have more than 14000 meanings. Assemblies of letters may in one place be a noun may elsewhere be a transitive verb, and still elsewhere be an intransitive verb: what a bouquet of bewilderment! Dealing with the utter illogically of English is like living in a house of bent mirrors often found in a carnival.

HOW TO IMPROVE THE LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM

Good educational practice requires that basic concepts be taught without distractions. Clear insight into the essentials of language can come from observing how the variables function in a model language. Once children

understand the basic anatomy of language they will not be defeated by the strange external garments of English. Or of foreign languages, for that matter.

Language arts instruction can be decisively improved by using proper instructional technique. Teaching should always progress from simple and general ideas to complicated and specific things like English. Language arts must introduce the model language as early as possible, say in first or second grade, as a suitable preparation for English. The name of the model language is Esperanto.

Since early in this century the Esperanto language has been known to be an excellent educational device. In 1933 Dr. Edward Thorndike's experiments at Columbia showed that Esperanto can serve as a very productive steppingstone into language study. In 1949 the journal *Education* discussed the mental training provided by the study of Esperanto. It is a resource which has been neglected by our educators all these years.

The root words of Esperanto come primarily from Latin, so that a student gains familiarity with this important set of words. There are many cognates with English, giving an English speaker some hints about meanings. However the real genius behind Esperanto is invisible. It consists of a systematic way to generate a limitless supply of words by combinations of a relatively few standard word parts. In principle, this is the same as the way millions of substances made out of only 110 chemical elements.

INTRODUCING ESPERANTO

An Esperanto program is relatively easy and inexpensive to establish and operate. Because Esperanto is unlike foreign languages, it can soon be learned by classroom teachers. Fluency is not necessary for error-free teaching. Simple compliance with the rules permits a teacher to begin helping students.Teachers may learn it by self study, by in-service classes, or by attendance at one of the universities offering summer courses.

Most of those who now teach Esperanto learned it at home. They used the free 10 lesson postal course to get started. This was supplemented by telephone coaching 1/2 hour a week, provided free by the Esperanto League for North America. After a few weeks they understood the grammar and pronunciation. Then they were able to begin sharing it with their classes while they themselves learned more.

In-service training can be provided by contract with an Esperanto instructor. School teachers should be given about 75 classroom hours of instruction in order to have a firm grasp of its 16 rules.

University training is currently available at San Francisco State University and at the University of Hartford, CT. These courses have the advantage of providing a social dimension in addition to the course material. The instructors and the student bodies consist of people from several countries. This diversity imparts an international flavor to learning Esperanto.

Teaching Esperanto to children is a pleasure because it captures the children's interest. Esperanto words are assemblies of unchangeable word parts joined together by logic. No other language has the systematic features of Esperanto. The freedom from irregularities permits children to concentrate on the content of their speech. After a few lessons they can begin pen pal correspondence with their counterparts in dozens of countries.

The Esperanto League for North America (ELNA) is a permanent source of help and advice for the classroom teacher. One of its publications is *Materials and Techniques for Teaching Esperanto*. ELNA is the major source for Esperanto books and magazines. Teachers also enjoy classroom visits by foreign as well as domestic Esperantists.

The yearly cost of an Esperanto program is minimal. No additional teacher is needed, because Esperanto is taught by the regular classroom teacher. $300 per year is adequate for reference material for a teacher. Dictionaries for children cost about $6. Most Esperanto materials are

simple, and can be made in the classroom. Subscriptions to 2 children's periodicals cost $15 per year apiece.

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Not only is Esperanto good for teaching general language concepts and skills to English speaking children, but it also can do the same for children who do not speak English. The streamlined nature of Esperanto permits it to be taught by the direct method to a group of children of a mixture of native languages.

When there are less than 20 children of a given native language in a school, the school is not required to establish a class in that language. So imagine a class of 17 children from Vietnam, China, Greece, Iceland, Iran, and Mongolia. Instead of ignoring them because of their small numbers they should be taught Esperanto in the same class. This would help them learn the English alphabet and sound system. Further it would equip them with many words used in English. Then Esperanto could be used to explain English. What better transition can be imagined?

FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Foreign languages are programmed for failure in United States schools. Usable proficiency simply cannot be gained in 4 years of high school study, much less in the typical 2 years which are often budgeted. Failure of this sort psychologically harms our young people. Many of today's ex-students will wrongly blame their own ineptitude, rather than a fundamentally flawed program for their inability to speak the language which they studied.

Learning Esperanto in elementary school can provide the equivalent of the first 2 years of a foreign language. In this way the student who studies a foreign language comes into it linguistically well prepared. Such a student is far more likely to succeed.

HOMESCHOOLERS

The million or so youngsters in the U.S. who receive schooling at home lack training in any language outside English because their parents generally lack such a skill. Those parents, like classroom teachers, can quickly gain a basic knowledge of Esperanto and begin teaching it. This responds to the fact that the human brain best learns language in the elementary years.

SUMMARY

Esperanto serves as a generic introduction for all languages. Children intuitively learn from it how human language functions. Thus Esperanto serves as an ideal transition into formal English for English speaking children. It can also serve children of different native languages by helping them into English. Contact with pen pals in dozens of countries generates interest in learning Esperanto. Esperanto in the elementary school can convert the abject failure of foreign language programs into success. The knowledge gained from Esperanto contacts adds to the students' knowledge of geography and social studies. In this way those who study Esperanto gain a vastly superior education.

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